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Face of the Master

F. R. Miller

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THE FACE OF THE MASTER

BY

J. R. MILLER

AUTHOR OF "SILENT TIMES," "UPPER CURRENTS,"
"TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW," ETC.

O Saul, it shall be
A face like my face that receives thee.
—BROWNING'S "SAUL."

ELEVENTH THOUSAND

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God . . . who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

ST. PAUL.

Then art thou like to God;
Thou, who didst bear the sin, and shame, and woe —
O Thou, whose sweat did flow —
Whose tears did gush, whose brow was dead and low?

No grief is like thy grief: no heart can prove
Love like unto thy love;
And none, save only Thou, — below, above, —
O God, is like to God!

MRS. BROWNING.

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THE FACE OF THE MASTER.

Love came down at Christmas,
  Love all lovely, love divine:
Love was born at Christmas,
  Star and angels gave the sign.

Love shall be our token,
  Love be yours, and love be mine.
Love to God and all men,
  Love for gift and plea and sign.

Christina Georgina Rossetti.

We have no portrait of Jesus Christ. The pictures of him which artists have given us are only their conceptions of his appearance. They have sought, some of them with reverent interest and with devout mind, to put into their representations the character which the gospels delineate in their narratives of our Lord's earthly life. But none of these pictures, however noble and worthy they may be, are to be thought of as true portraits of the Master's face. No such portrait has been preserved. So far as we know, no picture of him was ever made.

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The face of Jesus Christ must have been very beautiful. His life was spotless and pure. It is sin that disfigures the human countenance, and there was no sin in him. They tell us that the thoughts make the face. We cannot altogether hide our inner life from men's eyes. What goes on in the depths of our being comes up to the surface in unmistakable indications and revealings. A lady took a photograph of a child and touched it until the face seemed to have all the witchery and charm of life. But in a day or two there were spots all over it. Something in the paper on which the photograph was printed worked up through the delicate colors and marred their beauty. So the faulty qualities of the heart work out in the life and betray themselves in the face. If you are discontented, the discontent will reveal itself in your features. If you have bitter thoughts and feelings in your heart, the bitterness will write its hard lines on your countenance. But if you habitually think gentle thoughts, kindly thoughts, peaceful thoughts, on your face will come gentleness, kindness, and peace. If you keep love in your heart amid all the testings and tryings, all the irritations and harrowings, your face will shine with love. There is much truth in the familiar lines:

"Beautiful thoughts make a beautiful soul,
And a beautiful soul makes a beautiful face."

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We know that all the thoughts of the Master were beautiful thoughts. Heaven dwelt in him, and there was never any fleck of stain upon his spirit. In a world of hate, cruelty, and injustice, his heart was always full of love. Never was an unkind thought there for a moment. Infinite holiness dwelt in him. All the beatitudes had their home in his breast. All the fruits of the Spirit grew to perfect ripeness in him. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely," these were the things on which Jesus thought continually. He never had a sordid thought, an impure thought, a trivial thought, a selfish thought. His mind was never disturbed by discontent, by ambition, by anxiety. His converse was always with his Father. Though walking on the earth among sinful men, he really lived in heaven. All his feelings, desires, affections, and emotions were holy. He said he did always those things that were pleasing to his Father. If beautiful thoughts make a beautiful soul, the soul of Jesus was spotlessly, divinely beautiful. And if a beautiful soul makes a beautiful face, the face of Jesus was transcendently lovely.

Sorrow mars some faces. It need not do so. Only when it is not accepted in love and faith does

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it leave marks of disfigurement. Sorrow sweetly endured transfigures the face, giving it new beauty. Jesus was a man of sorrows. But his sorrows only made his face more radiant. Poverty writes hard lines on some faces. Jesus was poor. He had not where to lay his head. But his poverty left no trace on his features save to make them gentler, kindlier, more sympathetic toward human poverty and need. His face was quiet, calm, serene, heavenly.

THE FACE TRANSFIGURED.

Once, for an hour, we are told that Jesus was transfigured — his face did shine as the sun. That was because of the glory within. If he had been a bitter, hard man, or proud, or a man vexed by care, his face never would have appeared in transfiguration. Two other Bible faces shone — the face of Moses when he had been long in communion with God on the mount, and the face of Stephen when he sat in the court before his enemies. Their faces were dark with rage, but his wore a heavenly brightness — the revealing of the peace, the quiet, the joy that dwelt within, an

> "angel face
> All radiant with celestial grace."

The face of Jesus shone not one hour only, but always, with the splendor of the holy soul that

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dwelt within. It was a face altogether lovely. Those who saw it once never could forget it. Its memory stayed forever, like a blessed vision, in their hearts.

St. Paul speaks of "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It was more than physical beauty, then, that those who looked upon the Master saw in him; it was more, too, than the ordinary graces of human loveliness. Men saw in that face the outshining of divine glory, although they did not know it was glory. It seemed only human beauty, and yet they never had seen such beauty in any other face. Still they did not dream it was God's beauty.

The Incarnation is the most wonderful fact of all human history. The child that was born in the little town of Bethlehem that first Christmas night was different from any other child that ever was born in the world. The angel, announcing the great event to the shepherds, told them that he whose birth had brought such joy to the earth was a "Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

We are in danger of missing much of the meaning of this truth when we read the story of the human life of the Master, as it is told in the gospels. The message which Christmas brings to us anew year after year is, that God so loved the world that he came down to live with men in a real human life.

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He did this that he might get near to us — within our reach; that he might show to us in a common human life all the glory of divinity.

GLORY BROUGHT DOWN TO EARTH.

Once when a disciple made the request of Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," Jesus answered, "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me?" What Philip craved to see when he said, "Show us the Father," was some great glory, a dazzling splendor, a blinding transfiguration; some such display as was made to Moses on Sinai — clouds and thick darkness and flashing lightnings. Instead of that, however, Jesus told him that in his quiet, common life, all the three years he had been with him, Philip had been seeing the Father. All the glory of God was in the face of Jesus Christ.

What is the glory of God? When we think of God, what are the features or qualities that rise up in our minds? What sort of vision glows before us? If we were asked to name the one time in all our Lord's life when he revealed the most of God, perhaps we would suggest the transfiguration, or the miracle of the feeding of five thousand, or that of the raising of Lazarus. But when Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," he did not refer merely, or even

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primarily, to these great, startling manifestations of power, but to his daily quiet life of gentleness, kindness, patience, thoughtfulness, compassion, and love.

Sometimes we hear people speaking of the life of Jesus as if it were two distinct lives instead of one. They go over the wonders that he wrought — he changed water into wine; he touched the leper and cleansed him; he gave sight to the blind; he healed the sick; he quieted the storm and the sea; he raised the dead. "These are divine works," our friends say; "these are proofs of his deity." Then they go over other portions of his life in which appear only kindness, thoughtfulness, sympathy, helpfulness — the common things of his everyday life, in which there seemed to be nothing supernatural. "These," they tell us, "are the manifestations of the humanity of our Lord; things he did merely as a man."

But that is not a true view of the life of Jesus. He was not sometimes revealing his divine nature and sometimes his human nature. Always, in all his words and acts and dispositions, he was manifesting his divine-human life. Always he was God manifest in the flesh. He did not refer to his miracles only, when he said that when his disciples saw him they saw the Father. This was as true of the time when he took little children in his

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arms and blessed them, or when he sat resting in the Bethany home, or when he was talking with the woman at the well, as when he was transfigured on Mount Hermon, or when he was raising the young man at Nain. The glory of God was revealed in his commonest kindnesses as really as it was in his most stupendous miracles. All the glory of God shone in the face of Jesus Christ. God's glory is love — "God is love." If we would see God, we have only to look at the face of the Master. The benignity, the goodness, the compassion, the peace, the joy, the graciousness we see there are outshinings of deity.

NEARER THAN WE DREAM.

Thus it is that the glory of God shines nearer to us than we dream. It is often so, that after vainly seeking for some good or some blessing in long and painful quests, it is found at last close at hand. Sir Launfal, after searching through all lands, in storm and blast, for the holy grail, found it beside his own gate, in the deed of kindness done to a poor, crouching leper. This is a true story of the way many of us seek for Christ, to behold his face. We look for him where he is not, — we look for flashes of splendor, — and meanwhile we miss the glory of his presence where it shines in

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all its beauty in some lowly thoughtfulness and tenderness.

There is a legend of a monk who had a great desire to see Christ. He fled away from the world's haunts to a cloister where he could read, meditate, and pray, hoping there to look upon the blessed Face. There he spent his days in penance and his nights in prayer, refusing to look upon any face until the object of his quest had been attained. Bird-songs and children's voices and sweet flowers blooming outside his cell had no attraction for him. One morning he seemed to hear a spirit-voice, which said that that day he should see his Lord. He set himself with special care to watch for the blessed vision. At length there came a gentle tap upon his door, and a child's voice was heard pleading to be taken in and sheltered and fed. Her feet were cold, her clothing was scant and thin. But the saint was busy with his devotions, and had no time for others or their needs. So he paid no heed to the child's cry. He was waiting for the appearance of the glorious vision that was promised. So he waited on till the day was done — waited and was disappointed. He had not seen his Lord. The promise had not been fulfilled. Why was the vision so delayed? He did not know that the Christ had come in the

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child he heeded not, and that, unwelcomed, he had gone away.

"Unhappy monk, thou mayest pray for aye;
The answer to thy prayer was sent that day;
It lingered long, then sobbed, and turned away."

IN THE COMMON WAYS.

If we would see the face of the Master when he comes and walks among us, we must look for him in the common ways. In one of his poems Lowell tells the story of an ancient prophet who made a pilgrimage into the wilderness, until he came to Mount Sinai. God's presence had deserted him, and he thought that at Sinai, if anywhere in the world, he should find it again. As he engaged in prayer on the holy mount, expecting some strange and startling answer, the moss at his feet unfolded, and a little violet appeared. That was the answer to his prayer. He had found God again. Then he remembered that just before he left his home his little daughter had come running to him, offering him a bouquet of these very flowers. They grew at his own door. He saw them every day. He had travelled all that long, weary distance to receive a message which had been nigh to him all the time. People want some startling revelation, some unusual manifestation. But God comes to us in the sim-

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plest ways, in the giving of our daily bread, in the love of our friends, in the sweet affections of our homes, in the beauty and simplicity of the little children.

Even yet some people read the gospels and wonder if God loves them, if he sympathizes with them in their sorrows, if he cares when they have troubles, if he hears and answers prayers, if he is really gentle, patient, kind, easily approached, if he is indeed merciful, gracious and long-suffering. They ask, "Where has God manifested his love?" Here is a little story of a child and her mother, which illustrates the slowness of the world to see God in Jesus Christ: —

"A mother drew her darling to her breast,
And of her father in a far-off land
She strove to make the child-heart understand,
While, with a kiss of two-fold love expressed,
Intent to make his fondness manifest,
She said, 'Thy father sends his love to thee.'
The child looked up, as fain the gift to see,
And, from rose-lips, 'Where is it?' came the quest.

"'Where is it?' Foolish child, to question thus,
When all around, and in her mother's eyes,
It shone, and in its fulness she could bask!
Love needs no token. But are we more wise?
Our heavenly Father sends his love to us:
'Where is it?' in our ignorance we ask."

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We are like the child. Jesus says to us, "Your Father sends his love to you." We ask with weary heart, "Where is it? Where is his love?" while there, right before our eyes, is Jesus, with his blessed life, full of its divine revealings, and his cross with all its glory of love. In the face of the Master is all the glory of God. We look up into the skies, wondering why we cannot see God, not knowing that he is near to us continually.

The way to find Christ is to look for him in the common ways. This is the way to find our duty, too. Many people are always thinking of their mission in the world as something unusual. They do not suppose that anything so common as life's ordinary tasks could be the thing God wants them to do, the thing they were sent into this world to do. When they think of being of use in the world, they expect to have the opportunity of doing some fine thing, something out of the ordinary routine. But, as a rule, we find our best work, the things we are meant to do, our chances for being useful to others, in the line of our common duty. Here is a scrap from a recent story: —

"'If I could only be of some use in the world,' cried Frances, impatiently, 'or could fill some place in it, I would not complain.'

"'Well,' suggested Cousin Patty, 'making beds

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is very useful work. Your mother seems to need some one now to fill the place of mender-in-ordinary to the family. Why not begin where you are to be useful? I never saw anybody willing to be of use who could n't be used right where he stood. As for filling places, — did you ever think that you are put into your own place so as to fill that? Wanting to climb out of your own place before you have filled it, to go hunting for an empty one somewhere else, never seemed to me a sensible thing to do.'"

This fragment of conversation suggests a very common mistake and the way to prevent making it. Do the duty that comes next to your hand, and you will find yourself near to heaven. Do not wander everywhere, looking for the Christ. He is not far off. You do not need to climb mountains or cross seas to see him. Look for him in the midst of the tasks of the common days. He was made known at Emmaus, not in some splendid transfiguration, but in the breaking of bread at the common meal. Do your duty in the lowly ways and you will see the blessed Face beaming its love upon you.

A FACE THAT TRANSFORMS.

The face of Christ has transforming power. Those who look upon it in love, and intently, are

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changed by it into its own beauty. This teaching is brought out very clearly in the New Testament. Saint John tells us that when we shall see Jesus as he is, we shall become like him. There is a striking passage also in one of Saint Paul's epistles, in which the writer describes in wonderful way the transforming power of the face of Christ as we look upon it: "We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory." The glory of the Lord is the glory which shines in the face of Jesus Christ. We cannot see that glory with our eyes, for Christ is in heaven. But it is reflected for us on the pages of the gospel. As we ponder these pages intently we look upon the glory. The effect of this continued beholding is the transformation of our lives into the same image. That is, as we consider Christ, as we read the story of his life, as we think of him, meditate on the beauty of his character, look into his face with love and adoration, the brightness of that face prints itself upon our faces, and we are transformed into his image.

This transformation is not wrought suddenly, instantaneously, but gradually — "from glory to glory." A young Christian wrote to a friend asking a question. Some one had been saying that true Christians never lose self-control — that if we

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do so we are not true Christians. This was somewhat discouraging to the young learner who had not yet attained this complete self-mastery, who sometimes gave way to excited feelings and spoke impatiently, though striving always to live sweetly and grieving over failures. If this were one of the tests of discipleship, some of us, even some who are much older Christians than this young friend, would find ourselves weighed and found wanting. How many average Christians have achieved perfect self-control? How many of us, even of the most earnest of us, never speak unadvisedly, nor behave ourselves unseemly? We ought to live lives of entire self-mastery, never losing our temper, never growing impatient, never letting ourselves become provoked or irritated, never giving the rein to any desire, appetite, or passion, doing nothing rash. That is the ideal Christian life. Toward this ideal all of us are sincerely, earnestly, and prayerfully striving, if we are Christians at all. But we do not attain this or any other Christian grace at one step — it is the work of long days and years. Life is a school. The qualities of Christian character are studies set for us. No one learns music in one lesson. No one can become an artist in a day. No one can get the full beauty of Christ into his life in one brief year. We have it here in Saint Paul's words — "transformed into the same image

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from glory to glory," that is, line by line, little by little.

"He came to my desk with a quivering lip;
The lesson was done.
'Dear teacher, I want a new leaf,' he said;
'I have spoiled this one.'
In place of the leaf so stained and blotted,
I gave him a new one all unspotted,
And into his sad eyes smiled:
'Do better now, my child.'

"I went to the throne with a quivering heart—
The old year was done.
'Dear Father, hast thou a new leaf for me?
I have spoiled this one.'
He took the old leaf, stained and blotted,
And gave me a new one, all unspotted,
And into my sad heart smiled:
'Do better now, my child.'"

GOD'S WAY OF MAKING US.

God's usual way of making us into the divine beauty is through friendship with Jesus Christ. Even in close and continued human association life becomes like life. If two friends live together in love, year after year, they grow alike. Even in most casual intercourse we get from others and give to others. Every brief contact leaves its mark. "I am part of all I ever met," says a thoughtful writer. When association is long main-

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tained, this influence of life upon life is broadened and deepened. Friendship with Christ is the essential thing in spiritual culture. Not only is he our teacher — it is not enough that he shall set the lessons for us; but he brings down the divine life and imparts it to us. John lay upon the Master's breast, and in this close friendship grew into the Master's likeness.

It is thus that we all must live if we would get the beauty of Christ upon our lives. We never shall grow like him if we stay habitually far away from him. The Jews have a saying that if an angel should linger for seven days upon the earth he would become gross and opaque and would lose the power of his wings. If a Christian dwells remote from Christ he soon grows earthly and loses the spiritual loveliness out of his life. But if he abides near his Master, in adoring love, in close companionship, the glory of Christ enters his life and transforms him. Looking at Christ, intently, with devout, reverent heart, beholding him not merely in a brief glance now and then, but continuously, the brightness of that blessed face prints itself upon his life.

One of Hawthorne's short stories tells of the great Stone Face. The rocks on a mountain were so grouped that, looked at from a certain point, there was the appearance of a human face. There was

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a tradition among the people that some day there would come to the valley a man with the same gracious features which this stone face bore, a man who would have the noble character and personality represented by these features.

A boy, Ernest, listened one evening to this tradition from his mother's lips, and the tradition sank into the boy's heart and stayed there. He would look up at the noble stone face and wonder when the man would come who should fulfil the old prophecy. Three times a man came who the people thought might be the man of the stone face, but each time they were disappointed. Through days and years, while the boy grew to manhood and the man into old age, he continued to look at the stone face, pondering its noble beauty and unconsciously growing himself all the while into the beauty which his soul had idealized in that image on the mountain. He grew into wisdom and strength, and became a friend of the people and their teacher. By and by a poet, listening one day to Ernest's words as he spoke to his neighbors, discovered the resemblance and exclaimed, "Why, Ernest himself is like the great stone face!" Looking at that benign face all the years, pondering its features, he had been transformed into its image.

So those who look intently at the face of Christ,

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entering into the spirit of his life, walking in daily fellowship with him, bearing his cross, loving him and doing his will, take his image upon their own lives, grow like him, until neighbors and friends begin to see the resemblance and say, "Why, they are like the blessed Face of Jesus Christ."

LOVE A MAGIC SCULPTOR.

Life itself is meant to do its part in fashioning our faces into the beauty of Christ. Love is a magic sculptor. There is an interesting story of one who became a writer of world-wide influence, who in her youth was said to be the homeliest girl in the town where she lived. There was not an attractive line in her face. The girl herself recognized the fact that she had no beauty, nothing in her features to win others to her, and with charming good sense and in an admirable spirit she resolved to overcome the physical disadvantage by making her life and her personality so beautiful that people would love her and be attracted to her in spite of her homeliness. So she began to cultivate the graces of kindliness, gentleness, friendliness. She yielded her heart to the full sway of love. She became a minister of help, of cheer, of comfort, of joy, to all within her reach. Wherever there was sickness, care, trouble, need, or sorrow, she found her way, carrying the blessing of her

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kindly presence and the ministry of her gentle hands. She became known everywhere as a messenger of love. People forgot her plainness of feature in the genial warmth of her spirit. She was spoken of now, not as the homely girl, but as an angel of love in the community. Her face never grew beautiful and attractive in its physical features, but there was a light in it in later years which glorified its homeliness. Love is a wondrous beautifier.

The experiences of life, if we meet them in the right way, also help in bringing out the beauty of Christ on our faces. Indeed, the problem of living is so to relate ourselves to our circumstances and conditions and to the multitudinous events that befall us, that we shall always be growing in Christ-likeness. Saint Paul states this truth with great clearness in one of his epistles. "We know," he says, "that to them that love God all things work together for good." It is intended that we shall get some good from every experience, from the things that to us seem evil, quite as truly as from those that we regard as blessings. The temptations of our lives are meant by the Adversary to harm us, to leave blot and marring upon our souls, but when we resist them they become helpers of our spiritual progress and leave us stronger and wiser. Sorrows, which cut so deeply into our

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hearts, which seem to leave only wounds and scars, become purifiers.

"I call it 'rust,' this green and purple stain
Upon the ancient silver coin; but, nay!
'T is but the copper driven out, as pain
And sorrow purge from us the dross away.

"Pure, ah! how pure this precious disk, refined
By ages' testing, purer than the hour
When first in the great Emperor's mint it shined,
The glistening type of all its pomp and power.

"So we, all scarred and stained by life's long test,
Are we not purer than the soul untried,
Whose coarse alloy doth still abuse its best—
A coin that shines, but is unpurified?"

We need to remember, however, that it is only in the lives of those who love God that all things work together for good. If we would make sure of this happy outcome from all life's experiences we must keep ourselves in the love of God. That is, we must always believe in his love for us even in the most trying experiences, and must keep love in our hearts. If we lose our trust, if we rebel against God, if we grow disobedient, we miss the good that we might have received from "all things," and take hurt instead.

The problem for us is to accept all that comes to

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us in quiet confidence, to endure the things that are hard and painful sweetly and patiently, creeping closer to the heart of Christ when the darkness deepens, never doubting, never complaining, believing in the love that will never let us be harmed. If we thus meet all life it will work only good in us and for us, and every day a new line of the beauty of the face of Christ will be brought out in our faces.

THE MINISTRY OF FACES.

It is not a matter of indifference how we look when we move among people. We carry an unconscious message in our faces all the while wherever we go. We do not know what hurt we may do to others if this message is not one of cheer and hope. When Margaret Fuller was a child she said she used to sit in church and look at the worshippers, watching for the expression in their faces of the graces of religion of which they spoke and sang. But she was disappointed ofttimes. She did not see in them the peace, the gladness, the love she looked for. It seemed to the sensitive child that these men and women never thought of anything above the tasks and cares of the day. She never forgot the hurt she received then, and in her own womanhood, in times of sadness, she prayed earnestly that she might not harm others

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by revealing her depression, but that always in her face she might have a message of cheer for all who saw her, and might never cast on any life the shadow of discouragement.

We are responsible for our faces. We owe it to our Master to make them mirrors of his beauty and gladness. A group of girls were laughing and chatting together over some pictures. One of them had been to a photographer, and was showing some "proofs" of herself in varied poses.

"Look at this one," she said. "Did you ever see a more scowling and woe-begone creature? And the photographer actually said it was a good likeness, and wanted to finish it up. I suppose I did wear that expression just then, but what a picture to give one's friends to remember one by!"

But to how many friends has she given that very expression, printing on their memories a picture of that discontented, uncomfortable self that she now condemns so nonchalantly in the photographer's proof? We are careful of the miniatures and photographs we bestow upon our friends. We want them to represent us at our best. But oh, the views of ourselves we leave all unconsciously on the memories of neighbors and friends every day! The fretful look when trifles irritated us, the cold indifference when some longing eye sought in our features for an expression of sympathy, the smile

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that held a touch of ridicule where there should have been reverence, the angry scowl when some unpleasant duty was suggested — these unflattering expressions make pictures that last.

No one can tell the value of a bright, sunny face. One writes: "Next to the sunlight of heaven is the cheerful face. There is no mistaking it — the bright eye, the unclouded brow, the sunny smile, all tell of that which dwells within. Who has not felt its electrifying influence in meeting some man who always lives victoriously, with heaven's light shining on his countenance? One glance at his face lifts us out of the mists and shadows into the glad realm of hope. One cheerful face in a household will keep everything bright and warm within. A host of evil passions may lurk about the door, but they never enter to abide there; the cheerful face will put them to shame and flight."

It is not easy always to wear the "glorious morning face." When sorrow has left its wounding in our hearts it is no light task to keep the gloom out of our countenances. Yet that is what we should seek always to do. A mother who had passed through great sorrows said that she hid her grief away in her own heart and sought always to be bright and joyous for the sake of her children. She said she felt it would be a sin to wear a cloud on her face in their presence. We have no right

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to cast the shadow of gloom on any other life. When we suffer we should suffer victoriously, so that our faces may show even in tears the light of an overcoming faith.

Those who look upon the face of Christ in this world and receive its brightness and glory upon their own faces will at last behold that face in glory with unveiled eyes. In the Book of Revelation it is said of the redeemed in heaven: "They shall see his face." There will be no veils and shadows there; we shall see him as he is.

"Jesus, these eyes have never seen
That radiant form of thine;
The veil of sense hangs dark between
Thy blessed face and mine.

. . . . . .

"When death these mortal eyes shall seal,
And still this throbbing heart,
The rending veil shall thee reveal
All glorious as thou art."

THE BEATIFIC VISION.

This beatific vision is waiting somewhere in the future for each of us, if we are Christ's, — for some farther off, for some nearer, nearer, perhaps, than they think. But it cannot come too soon if we are living faithfully, for only in what men misname dying can we reach the crowning blessedness

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of faith — seeing Christ face to face. For the present, however, our place is still in this world, because we have something of God's will yet to do here. But even here we can see the face of our Master by faith, and be thrilled by its glory, and as we behold it in adoring love and deep humility, though we are not aware of it ourselves, others see the beauty of that face coming slowly, yet unmistakably, into our own faces. That is what Saint Paul says, "God . . . shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." That is, God would put the shining picture of Jesus Christ into our hearts, and that will transfigure us.

On the first Christmas night a little company of lowly shepherds saw the first shining of the face of Jesus in this world. It was only a small baby-face in a manger then. Now the glory streams over all lands. It is ours to help all men to see that glory. We have no picture to scatter over the earth which will show men the loveliness we see in Christ. Telling the story of the love of Christ is one way of doing this. But that is not the only way. We will best do our part and fulfil our task if we reproduce the beauty of that face in our own lives, so that each of us shall make a little Christmas every day in one small corner of the earth.

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There are many pleasant things in this world which we may miss and not be the poorer. But if we miss being fashioned into the beauty of Christ, nothing else we may gain will compensate for the loss. Many good people seem to fail in life. They toil through all their years, and at the last their hands are empty. Yet if in all their striving they have always been doing humbly and faithfully the will of God, their lives have not been failures. While they have not won the earthly prizes they sought, they have been growing day by day into the beauty of the Lord.

"One prayed in vain to paint the vision blest
Which shone upon his heart by night and day,
For homely duties in his dwelling pressed,
And hungry hearts which would not turn away,
And cares which still his eager hands bade stay.
The canvas never knew the pictured Face,
But, year by year, while yet the vision shone,
An angel near him, wondering, bent to trace
On his own life the Master's image grown,
And unto men made known."

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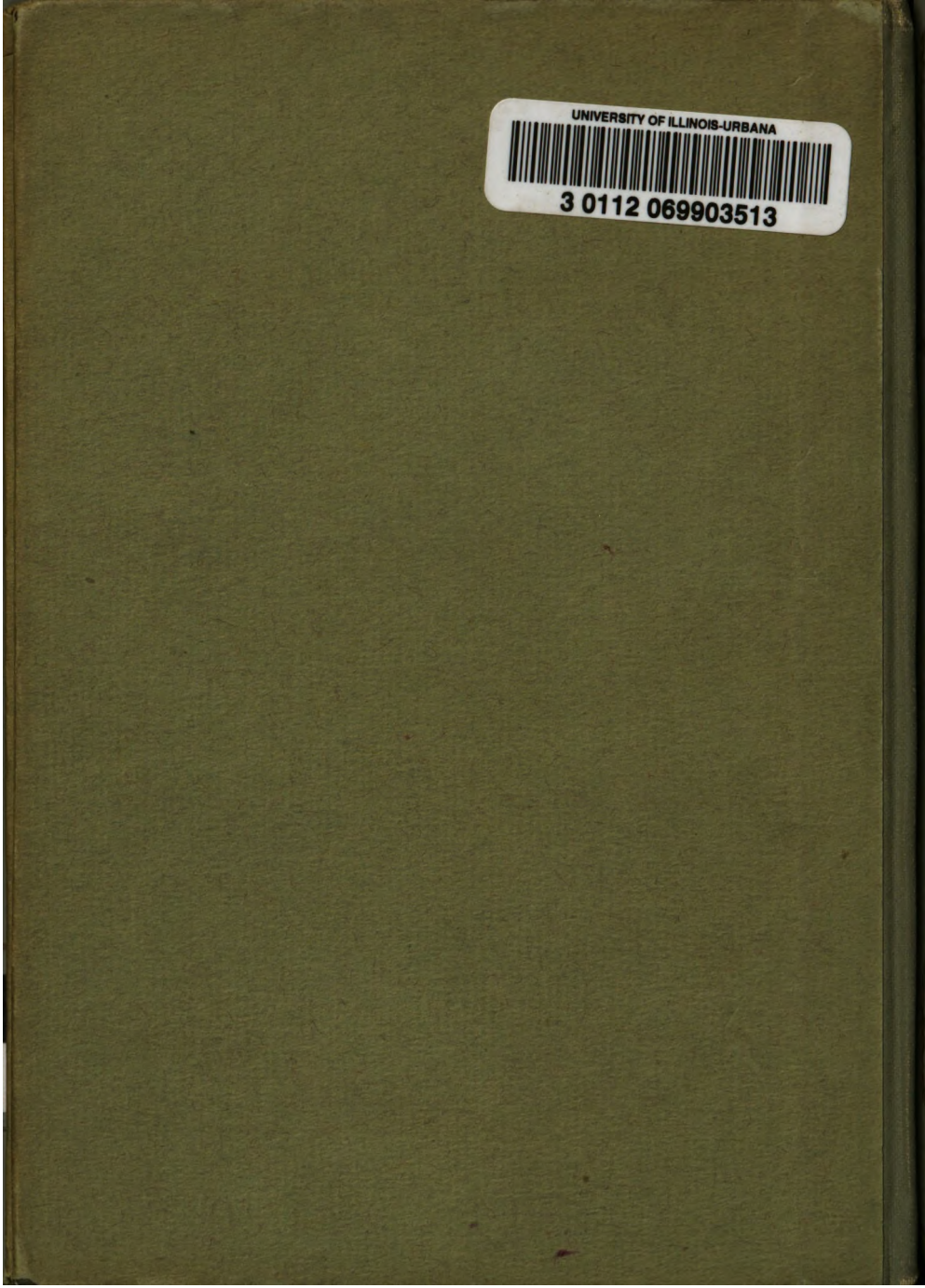
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